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THE HOLY FATHER AND THE LIVING CHRIST

BY P. T. FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.

THE SILENT HOUR BOOKLETS

THE HOLY FATHER AND THE LIVING CHRIST

BY P. T. FORSYTH, M.A., D.D.
PRINCIPAL OF HACKNEY COLLEGE,
HAMPSTEAD. ✦ ✦ ✦



THE SILENT HOUR
BOOKLETS



HODDER & STOUGHTON

The Holy Father

THE HOLY FATHER.

ST. JOHN xvii. 11.

WHEN the 103rd Psalm says, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him," it comes home to a time like our own. It is one of those gleams of vision in which the soul of Israel outran the spirit of its age. It transcended its own genius. It rose from the covenant God to the father God. It uttered an *intuition* whose source was *inspiration*, and which in the fulness of time rose into the *revelation* of God's first and last relation to the world. The music, heart, and passion of it lives for ever in Christ—endless pity, endless promise, endless power—lingering, searching pity, loving and lifting promise, weariless power and peace.

An intuition
whose source
was inspiration

But it points beyond itself. There is a height and a depth in the Father beyond His utmost pity and His kindest love. He is *Holy* Father and Redeemer, and it is His holiness of fatherhood that is the source of our redemption and sonship. It is not their obstacle. "Thou, O Lord, art our Holy One, *therefore* we shall not die." He is father of pity to human weakness, still more father of grace to human sin, but chiefly father

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of holy joy to our Lord Jesus Christ. The New Testament name and idea of God is not simply "Our Father," but "the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And Christ's own prayer was "Holy Father." That was Christ's central thought of God, and He knew God as He *is*. The new revelation in the cross was more than "God is love." It was this "Holy Father." That is, God at His divinest, as He was *to* Christ, as He was *in* Christ.

In the Old Testament God is father often enough as well as in other faiths. And in the 103rd Psalm it appears in a more original and tender way than I can stop to point out. But it is with many limitations. The name, for instance, is as yet imported into God rather than revealed from Him. He *is like* a father more than He *is* a father. And He is Israel's father only. "Them that fear Him" means Israel. But the chief limitation is this. The name is not yet evangelised. Fatherhood is not yet brought into direct connection with holiness, sin, sacrifice, redemption—only with weakness. The pity of the Father is connected with the allusion to our frail frame in those few verses, not with our transgression and the forgiveness which is the burden of the psalm. God is Father, and He is holy, but it is not as Holy Father that He redeems. Fatherhood in the Old Testament neither demands sacrifice nor makes it, but in the New Testament the Holy Father does both. The holiness is the root of love, fatherhood, sacrifice, and redemption.

The ethical standard is becoming supreme with

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us to-day, not only in conduct, but also in theology. We may welcome the change. It carries us farther—to a standard truly spiritual. It plants us on God's holiness as His perfect nature, His eternal spirit, His ruling self and moving centre. We have been over-engrossed with a mere distributive equity, which has made God the Lord Chief Justice of the world. Or we have recoiled from that to a love slack and over-sweet. But this lifts us up to a more spiritual and personal standard, to the Fatherly holiness whose satisfaction in a Holy Son is the great work and true soul of Godhead. The divine Father is the holy. And the Holy Father's first care is holiness. The first charge on a Redeemer is satisfaction to that holiness. The Holy Father is one who does and must atone. Atonement wears a new glory when read in Christ's own light. We see it flowing in grief *from that very holiness* of the Father to which it returns in praise. As Holy Father He is the eternal Father and maker of sacrifice no less than of man. He offers a sacrifice rent from His own heart. It is made to Him by no third party ("for who hath first given unto Him"), but by Himself in His Son; and it is made to no foreign power, but to His own holy nature and law. Fatherhood is not bought from holiness by any cross; it is holiness itself that pays. It is love that expiates. "Do not say, 'God is love. Why atone?' The New Testament says, 'God has atoned. What love!'" The ruling passion of the Saviour's holy God is this passion to atone and to redeem.

A sacrifice rent
from His own
heart

All this and more is in that "*Holy Father*,"

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which is the last word in the naming of God. The Church of to-day has gained greatly in its sense of the *love* of God. There are still greater things waiting when she has moved on as far again, to that *holiness* whose outward movement is love, which love is but the passion to impart. You can go behind love to holiness, but behind holiness you cannot go. It is the true consuming fire. Any real belief in the Incarnation is a belief in the ultimacy, centrality, and supremacy of holiness for God and for man. We may come to holiness by way of love, but we only come to love by reason of holiness. We may be all aglow for the coming of the kingdom, but there is a prior petition. It is the kingdom's one condition, "Hallowed be Thy Name." That hallowing was done in Christ's death which founded the kingdom. We are in some danger of inverting the order of these prayers to-day. "Thy kingdom come" is not the first petition. The kingdom comes from the satisfaction of holiness. It does not make it. "God is Love" is not the whole gospel. Love is not evangelical till it has dealt with holy law. In the midst of the rainbow is a throne. There is a kind of consecration which would live close to the Father, but it does not always take seriously enough the holiness which *makes* the fatherhood of the cross—awful, inexhaustible, and eternal, as full of judgment as of salvation.

We cannot put too much into that word Father. It is the sum and marrow of all Christian divinity. It is more than natural paternity spiritualised. It is a supernatural word altogether when the cross

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becomes its key. But we may easily put into it too little. That is what we all do in some way. Only once has enough been put into it. And that was in the faith and work of Christ, "Father, forgive them." "Father"—that was His faith. "Forgive them"—that was His work. The soul of divine fatherhood is forgiveness by holiness. It is evangelical. It is a matter of grace meeting sin by sacrifice to holiness, more even than of love meeting need by service to man. To *correct* and revive that truth, to restore it to its place in the proportion of faith, would be to restore passion to our preaching, solemnity to our tenderness, real power to our energy, and moral virility to our piety. Our piety is too weak in the face of the virile passions it should rule. The chief lack of religion to-day is authority; and it must find that in the cross or nowhere, in the real nature of the cross, in its relation to the holy demand of God.

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We put too little into that word Father, either when we think below the level of natural fatherhood, or when we rise no higher than that level.

I.

By thinking below that level; when we do not rise to regard God as Father at all.

Few of us now make that mistake in theory. But most do in practice. Their *practical* thought of God is not always as Father even if they speak much of the Fatherhood. By practical I mean what really and experimentally affects their religion, colours their habit of soul, moulds their

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silent tone of mind, helps and sustains their secret heart. They treat God as power, judge, king, providence of a sort. He is for them at most a rectorial Deity. But it is the few perhaps who in their living centre and chronic movement of the soul experience sonship as the very tune of their heart, the fashion and livery of their will. Most Christians are not worldlings, but they are hardly sons. They are only in the position of the disciples who stood between Judaism and Pentecost, who received Christ but had not as yet the Holy Ghost. They are not sons but have only received power to become sons. The fatherhood has not broken out upon them through the cross and caught them away into its universal heaven. The great mass of religion, real and practical as it may be, is not yet sonship. It is more or less earnest, active, compassionate. It is Catholic or it is Protestant; it is ecclesiastical, political or pietist; it is eager for the kingdom and set on some form of God's will. Its philanthropy ranges from the deepest and most devoted sacrifice to a kind of charity which is mainly institutional, fashionable, heartless, and on the way to become as hollow as Dickens in his one-eyed way saw it might be. But what it does not enough realise in experience (the preacher himself accuses his own) is the centre and summary of God's will and kingdom, the fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. But prior to the true doing of the will is the trusting of it. "This is the will of God that ye should believe in His Son Jesus Christ." This is His commandment that we should love—really love,

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and not simply do the works which are inspired and suggested by those who have loved.

But to dwell on that is happily no longer the chief need of the hour.

II.

We put too little into the name Father, when we think no higher than natural fatherhood at its heavenly best. It was not by a father or all earth's fatherhood that God revealed Himself. That would have been but manifestation, not revelation. It was by a son and a cross—whose message is the true supernatural of the world. What I mean is that we make too little of the Father when we do not rise beyond *love* to *grace*—which is holy love, suffering hate and redeeming it. The true supernatural is not the miraculous, but the miracle for whose sake miracles exist. It is not prodigy in nature but the grace of God in history. It has no direct relation to natural law. Miracle is not a scientific idea but a religious. An event is a miracle not by its relation to law but to grace. The Incarnation would be equally a miracle, however Jesus entered the world. It is not nature that is the true region of the supernatural, but history; and history not as a chain of events, but as the spiritual career of the soul or of the race. That is the true region of the supernatural. It lies in the action of God's will upon men's wills, not upon natural law. It is the work of God's grace upon men's sin. The miracle of the world is not that God should love His children or even His prodig-

Beyond love
to grace

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gals. Do not even the publicans likewise? But it is that He should love, forgive, and redeem His enemies; that His heart should atone for them to His own holy nature; that He should consecrate, a suffering greater even than they devised, all the suffering they might have to endure; and by their central sin and its judgment destroy sin at its centre. That would be miracle if nature's laws were no more. That is Fatherhood when we speak of God. That is the fatherhood whose life, motive, and security is holiness. That fatherhood is the one mystery and miracle. To nature it is absolutely foreign, impossible, and incredible. Of all things it is least a matter of course. It is a matter of conflict, of conquest, of revelation, credible only by the aid of the spirit that inspired it. It is the fatherhood of the cross, with the grace which that fatherhood shows, and the atonement it finds.

Between us and the Holy Father there comes what does not come between us and any earthly father—sin. Sin, hell, curse, and wrath! The wrath and curse of God not on sin only, but on the soul. O you may correct the theology of it as you will, but you cannot wipe—not all the perfumes of progress can hide—the reality of these things from the history of the soul, or from its future. They abide with us because the Holy Father will not leave us, because grace is the “hound of heaven.” They are a function of that holiness which is love's own ground of hope. We do not and cannot SIN against natural fatherhood, however ill we may treat it. Sin is unknown to nature, to natural relations, natural love. Nature includes no

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holiness; and it is holiness that makes sin sin. It was not against his father that the prodigal *sinned*; and his treatment is not the whole sum of sin's cure. He truly says "I have sinned *against* heaven and *before* thee"—*against* heaven, but only *before* his father. It is not the whole fulness of the Gospel that we have in that priceless parable. Christianity is the religion of redemption, and it is not redemption we have there, only forgiveness. If it were the whole, then Christ could be dispensed with in the Gospel, for He is not there. And the father is not put before us as a *holy* father, but as good, patient, wise, and infinitely kind—a magnified and most natural man. He does not stand for the whole of God, nor even for the whole grace of God. He stands not at all for the *cost* to a Holy God of His grace, but only for the utter freeness of it. Nor is He presented as Trustee of the world's moral order, of History's destiny, of Humanity's moral soul and future, or of Eternity's holy law. He feels but personal grief and wounded affection. It is an individual matter; and redemption is not. It is a matter between two individuals, and redemption is not. A soul can neither be saved nor sanctified without a world. To redeem, the sin must be destroyed, a universe re-organised. Yet the treatment of a world of sin, a sinful race, does not here arise. Nor are any steps taken by the father to cause repentance. And it is a question altogether whether the leading motive in the parable historically did not lie in the elder brother and his treatment; whether its centre of gravity is not at the close; whether that is not the foreground

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The Father-
hood is more
than love

which called the picture into existence, and for whose sake the wonderful background is there.

We put too little into fatherhood then if we treat it simply as boundless, patient, waiting, willing love. It is more than the love which accepts either beneficence (like Faust's) as repentance, or repentance as atonement, and eagerly cuts confession short thus—"Let us say no more about it. Pray do not mention it. Let bygones be bygones." Forgiveness, fatherhood, *for the race*, does not mean, with all its simplicity, just a clean page and a fresh start and a sympathetic allowance for things. God does not forgive "everything considered." To understand all is not to forgive all. That is mere literary ethics, not the moralist's, certainly not the Christian theologian's. There was more fatherhood in the cross (where holiness met guilt) than in the prodigal's father (where love met shame). There was more fatherhood for our souls in the desertion of the cross than in that which melts our hearts in the prodigal's embrace. It is not a father's sensitive love only that we have wounded, but His holy law. Man is not a mere runaway, but a rebel; not a pitiful coward, but a bold and bitter mutineer. Does not Kant confess as a moralist the radical evil in man, and Carlyle speak of his infinite damnability? There is many a living Mephistopheles in Europe. And the horror of the cursed, cursed, cursed Sultan belongs to the human race—to the solidarity of the race. "Miserable sinners," which the slight individualist boggles at in his prayers, is a poor confession when we remember that we are voicing in our

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public worship the sin of the race. Forgiving is not just forgetting. It is not cancelling the past. It is not mere amnesty and restoration. There is something broken in which a soul's sin shatters a world. Such is a soul's grandeur, and so great is the fall thereof; so seamless is the robe of righteousness, so ubiquitous and indefectible the moral order which makes man man. Account must be had, somewhere and by somebody, of that holiness of God which is the dignity of fatherhood and soul of manhood. There are debts that cannot simply be written off and left unrecovered. There is a spiritual order whose judgments are the one guarantee for mankind and its future. That law of holiness can by no means whatever be either warned off or bought off in its claim. God cannot simply *waive* it as to the past, nor is it enough if He simply *declare* it for all time. In His own eternal nature it has an undying claim to which He must *give effect* in due judgment somewhere, if He is to redeem a world. The enforcement of God's holiness by judgment is as essential to a *universal and eternal* Fatherhood as is the outflow of His love. It was not cursed suffering only that fell on the Saviour, it was holy judgment. The Holy Father dealt there with the world's sin on (not in) a world-soul. God in Christ judged sin as a Holy Father seeking penalty only for holiness' sake. He gathered it in one there, and brought it to issue, focussed thus, with His unity of holy law. The misery and death which the sinner bears blindly, sullenly, resentfully, was there understood with the understanding of Holy God; the guilt was seen

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as God sees it; the judgment was accepted as God's judgment, borne, owned and glorified before the world as holy, fatherly, just, and good. That final witness of holiness to holiness amid sin's last wreck, penalty, and agony—that is expiation as the Father made it in the Son, not changing His *feeling*, but by crisis, by judgment, eternally changing His *relations* with the world.

III.

The forgive-
ness of the
Father

It is at once easier and harder for God to forgive than man. Harder, because He is holy and feels the wound; easier, because He is holy and feels the moral power. In any case it is beyond us. It involves a sacrifice which costs more than sin-struck souls could pay. Sin steadily maims the sense of holiness and the power of sacrifice to it. And even if man by any sacrifice, or even penitence, could mend the moral order he has broken, it would be royal for him no more. It would be supreme and commanding for him no more. If we could heal our own conscience, it would no more be our king. If we could satisfy the moral order we disturbed, our insufferable self-satisfaction would derange it straightway. We should be (as Luther said) "the proudest jackasses under heaven." We may sorrow and amend, but we cannot atone and reconcile. Why, we cannot atone to each other, to our own injured or neglected dead, for instance, our silent inaccessible dead. I think of Carlyle's stricken widowerhood. Neither by hand nor heart can we come at them, nor bring them a whole

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lone life's amends. Our jealous God monopolises the right of atoning to them for us. We cannot even beseech their forgiveness. We cannot offer them ours. We cannot pray to them, we can but pray *for* them. We can but pray God to atone to them for us. We may live, like Carlyle, to eighty in a long, penitent widowerhood, and *then* we cannot atone to our wronged or lonely dead, nor smooth a feather of the angels who tarried with us, and we never knew them for angels till they had flown. And there may be broken hearts that live on sweetly to forgive their seducer, but which he can never mend, he can never atone. Nay, we cannot atone to our own souls for the wrong we have done them. We sin—and for us inexpiably—against our own souls. How much less, then, can we atone to our injured, neglected, sin-stung God. If our theology would let us, our conscience would not. The past cannot be erased, cannot be altered, cannot be repaired. There it stands. It can only be atoned; and never by us. If our repentance atoned, it would lose the humility which makes it worth most. It is atonement that makes repentance, not repentance that makes atonement. No man can save his brother's soul—no, nor his own. When Christ knew and said that He could, He knew Himself to be more than man. Man's debt no man can pay. Even God could not just cancel it. None could pay it but the prodigal's Father for him. For the debt was obedience, holiness, not suffering. Penalty only expiates crime, not sin. There was owed that debt to holiness, that atonement to holiness which is so misconstrued

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The quality of
mercy is not
strained

when we make it due to justice, or demanded by justice alone. Justice wants penalty, holiness wants holiness in the midst of penalty. It wants a soul's own perfect holiness in the midst of penalty due to other souls; it wants loving obedience amid the penalty of loveless defiance. God alone could fulfil for us the holy law He never broke, and pay the cost He never incurred.

And He has paid it, so freely and completely that His grace in forgiving is as full and free to us as if it had cost Him nothing, as if it had been just kindness. The cost is so perfectly and freely borne that it never appears in a way to mar the graciousness of grace, or deflower the Father's love. The quality of mercy is not strained.

That artist who works with such consummate ease, swiftness, and grace, how did he come by it? By hours and years of cost, in practice, in drudgery, slavery, self-mastery, self-sacrifice, by a life he would often describe as one of labour and sorrow more than joy. But the master's art keeps all that out of sight. The grace He offers you is not to be spoiled by the obtrusion of such cost.

The friend you receive, and think nothing in the house too good for him—do you let him know of that trouble with the cook, of those hours of wakeful contrivance by which you earn the means of spending your hospitality on him, of that weakness of body which you master every time you laugh with him, that heartache which you keep down while you make everything so pleasant for him?

So God does not mar His grace by always

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thrusting on us what it cost. Some part of the failure and decay of evangelicism (not to say Christianity) is due to the glib parade and unreal obtrusion of solemnities in redemption, about which Christ and His apostles held fine reserve. Even of sin, which is a commonplace of religious talk, Christ never spoke except in connection with its forgiveness. But reserve is not denial. The parable of the Prodigal is there, like every other parable, not to embody a complete system, but to light up one point in particular, which is the *freeness* of God's grace, the grace of it, the bloom upon the Fatherhood. The parable does not teach us that this grace cost nothing, that no superhuman satisfaction was required, that atonement is a rabbinic fiction. Rabbinic! Must it be fiction because rabbinic? It comes ill from liberal thought this nailing at Rabbinism. If God was not moving in the Rabbinic thought of Christ's day, what reason have we to say He moved in Buddhism, or moves in the thought of to-day? But as to the parable, it only tells us that grace is as free as love, that it could not flow more free if it had cost nothing, that the Almighty mastery of redemption is awful but entire, and altogether lovely. We have other reasons to know that if it had cost nothing, it could not have been so free. There is no precious freedom that costs nothing. Without blood, without cost, no remission, no release, no finding of the self, no possessing of the soul, no self-possession, no ease, grace, royalty, or liberty in the soul's matter or style. Without cross no crown for the soul. It is equally true of God and man. Grace

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does mean cost—but cost completely triumphantly met. Take God's grace in its fulness, richness, kindness. You cannot put too much freedom into the grace of the Father. The ease of its manner rests on the mighty gravity of its matter. Art conceals art. The art in forgiving, the utter grace of it, conceals the art of redeeming, the dread labour, sorrow, and secret of it.

IV.

A truth that we
must and can
have

Revelation has its great reserves as conditions of its power. They are not forbidden ground, but they are not flashed in our eyes. Both Christ and the New Testament are disappointingly reticent about the cost of grace, the "plan of salvation," the "theory of Atonement," the precise way and sense in which Christ bore our curse before God, and took away the guilt of the world. Yet such truth (if there be a Holy Ghost and Church) we must have and we can. The saved conscience craves it for its moral world. It is quite necessary for *the Church's* faith, and at last for the individual's. If you never realise at all the cost of grace, you run some risk of making grace of none effect. After all, we are "scarcely saved." To go back to the parable which immortalises the freeness of grace. What should you think of the forgiven son, who, as the pardoned years went on, never took his mercy seriously enough to give a thought to what he had brought on his father or God? If he never cared to go behind that free forgiveness which met him and feasted him without

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an upbraiding word; if he never sought to look deep into those eyes which had followed him, watched him, and spied him so far; if he was never moved by the amazing welcome to put himself in the depths of his Father's place; if he took it all with a light heart, and told the world that in forgiveness he felt nothing but gladness; if he said that that was all we know and all we need to know; if the swift forgiveness of God made it easy for him to forgive himself and just forget his past; if the generous, patient father never became for him the Holy Father; if he felt it was needless and fruitless to enter into the dread depths of sin with the altar candle of the Lord, or explore the miracle of the Father's grace—what should you think of him then?

Give him, of course, a year or two, if need be, to revel in this glad and sweet surprise. Give to his soul (if need be) a holy honeymoon. But if the years go on and he show no thirst to search those things which the angels desire to look into, but cannot (being unhuman and unredeemed); if he never seek to measure the latent meaning of it all for the Redeemer, and give no sign of being deepened in conscience as the fruit of being redeemed there; if there be no trace of his coming to himself in a sense still deeper than when he turned among the swine; if he go on with a mere readiness of religious emotion, and a levity of religious intelligence which cares not to measure his sin by the finer standards of the Father's spirit, or gauge the holy severity of the love he spurned; if he learn nothing of the Lord's controversy and His mortal

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moral strife; if he weigh nothing of the sin of the world in the scales of eternal redemption—if his career in grace were such as that, what should we think of him then? Should we not have reason to doubt whether he was not disappointing the Father again, if he was not falling from grace in another way, and this time in a religious way. He might take the genial cultured way of a natural goodness with philanthropy for repentance, an easy optimism, a beautiful Fatherhood, tasteful piety, social refinement, varied interest, ethical sympathies, æsthetic charm, and a conscience more enlightened than saved. Or he might take the pietist's way. And then is the risk fanciful of his sinking, perhaps, in the ill-educated cases, through a fluent religionist into a flimsy saint, lapped in soft airs, taking a clique for the kingdom, and sold to the religious nothings of the hour with all their stupefying power; with no deepness of earth, no pilgrim progress, no passion of sacred blood, no grasp on real life, no grim wrestling, no power with God, no mastery of the soul, no insight, no measure of it, no real power to retain for himself, or for others to compel a belief in the soul, its reality or its Redeemer? And even if an individual is saved from these perils of religious impressionism, a church which acted so would not escape.

V.

The parable of the Prodigal puts before us the rich freeness of God's grace in a story. But Christ Himself sets it before us in a living soul, as the

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The parables

living grace eternal in our midst. Did Christ utter His whole self in that parable, His whole mind and experience of His work, His whole sense of the depths and heights of sin, grace and glory? If He was the great gospel, could He put whole self into any parable? No, nor into all the parables and all the precepts taken together. There came, when words had proved fruitless for teaching, and parables failures, the last great enacted parable of the Supper, the last great prayers of the garden, and the last great miracles of the cross and the tomb. When Christ came to these things, do you think there was no more in His mind about the cost of Fatherhood than He put into the story of His prodigal? There was a world more. Peter years after spoke, as the Lord the Spirit taught him, of the costly blood of Christ. And it is a strain repeated in the thought of every apostle. Indeed, they saw the life and words of Christ, not only irradiated by His death, but in the radiance even lost or obscured. *The word of the gospel was not so much the words of Jesus as the one compendiary word of the cross showing forth the righteousness of God, and doing a work for us which is the source and ground of any work in us.* The mere space given to the Passion in the gospels shows that to the company of Jesus He was more of a Mediator than even a Teacher, and that the Holy Ghost came from His cross more than from His doctrine.

Still, it remains true that from Christ Himself we have almost nothing in proportion about the holy cost of Fatherhood, the Godward action of His

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suffering and death. What most engrossed Him, even at the close, He said least of. It was not man's need of Him, nor His action on man. It was God's need of Him; God's real need of His sorrow, God's holy will for His obedience, the action of His cross on the holiness of God. For Christ the first effect of His cross was not on man, else He would have had more to say about it. It was on the Father. And at the end that grew His closest concern. Yet He has little or nothing to say of it for our theological satisfaction. We have but a word or two to show that the nature of the cross and atonement was prayer, that the act into which He put His whole life and soul was in its essence prayer—a dealing with God. We have but a few words, wrung from the agony of this clear, sure, resolute, silent man, though in keeping with the attitude of His whole life. But a few words—and these only as it were overheard, not said for transmission, and, like ourselves, "scarcely saved." It is a reticence which is only intelligible if the Son was dealing with the Father in an objective way, apart from the effect of His act and agony upon us. It is in some contrast with the tone of the epistles, reticent as they are. And it has moved the humanism of the day to dispute the entire legitimacy of the succession between epistle and gospel, to rescue the Christ of the gospels from the Christ of the epistles, to save Christ from Paul, and Christ's religion from New Testament Rabbinism.

Well, I will leave on one side the suggestion that the disciples did not understand enough of

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Christ's words about His death to remember them all as they might. I will not say there is nothing in the suggestion. The gospels were not meant for a finished portrait of Christ, or a complete manual of His truth. They were but supplementary in their origin. It is unhistoric to treat them as sole and complete. They were written for people who had already received the gospel, or had the epistles, in order to fill out their knowledge of Christ. They were less to convey saving knowledge than to enrich it, because the apostles were passing away and leaving no successors behind. Besides, we must remember when we think of the disproportion in the contents of these small memoirs that though we need Christ's work of grace *more*, we need His tenderness and His teaching *oftener* in the Christian life. The *weight* of the gospels is in their compressed close. But whatever may be in such suggestions is not all. I venture to offer one or two considerations of a different kind in explanation.

VI.

It would not be like the grace of God, it would be *ungracious*, if He came forgiving man and yet laying more stress on what it cost Him to do it than on His joy, fulness, and freedom in doing it. You find poor human creatures who never can overlook your mistake without conveying to you that it is as much as they can do. They think no little of themselves for doing it. They take care that you shall never forget their magnanimity in

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God's way of
forgiveness

doing it. They keep the cost of your forgiveness ever before you. And the result is that it is not forgiveness at all. How miserable a thing it is instead! How this spirit takes the charm from the reconciliation! How it destroys the grace of it! How penurious the heart it betrays! How it shrivels the magnanimity it parades! How grudging, how ungodlike it is! How unfatherly! What an ungracious way of dealing with the graceless!

That is not God's way of forgiveness. His Fatherhood has the grand manner. It has not only distinction, but delicacy. He leaves us *to find out* in great measure what it cost—slowly, with the quickened heart of the forgiven, to find that out. Christ never told His disciples He was Messiah till it was borne in on them by contact with Him. He never told them till, by the working of the actual Messiahship upon them, they found it out. Revelation came home to them as discovery. It burst from experience. So gracious is God with His revelation that He actually lets it come home to us as if we had discovered it. That is His fine manner—so to give as if we had found. His shining may even be forgotten in our seeing. And so in a way with our forgiveness it dawns on us. Its freedom gives us the power to see its cost. The crown of the new life is the power not only to enjoy it but to prize it. It is borne in on the forgiven. It is a truth of experience. It is reconciliation taking account of itself. The first condition of forgiveness is not an adequate comprehension of the Atonement, and a due sense of the cost. That is not saving faith. Any adequate idea on that head

The Holy Father

comes only to the saved. The cross becomes a theology only by beginning as a religion. The condition of forgiveness is answering the grace and freedom of it with a like free, humble, and joyful heart. It is taking the freedom of it home, and not the cost. It is committing ourselves to God's self-committal to us. It is taking God at His word—at His living word, Christ—His urgent, reticent, gracious, masterful word, Christ.

It was left to the redeemed, to His apostles especially, sanctified by a new life, vision, and measure of all things, it was left to all the faithful as their true successors, to dwell on the costly side of the Christ's work, to draw out the hidden wealth of the Father's grace, and the demands of the Father's nature in Christ's cross, and to magnify what the Fatherhood cost both Father and Son. It was indeed even then the teaching of Christ. The earthly Christ was not the all of Christ. The whole Christ was there, but not all that is in Christ. *Totus Christus sed non totum quod in eo est*, says Calvin. He taught Paul in the spirit as truly as He taught the disciples in the flesh. And in Paul He had perhaps a more teachable disciple than they were—a more sensitive pupil, a more adequate soul, and possibly even on points a more trusty reporter of His truths than they. There is an insight into the meaning of His work opened up by the humbled and grateful experience of those first saints whom that work remade. And they certainly confess that it was the work of the cross more than the words of His mouth that made them what they were. The cross

The Holy Father

Christ did more to reveal than to interpret God

His Father's Son, little of His achievements, and of the pain and cost of them next to nothing at all.

The more the Gospel says to us, the more we are impressed with its silence. There is a form of the thirst for souls, of religious eagerness, of evangelical haste and pious impatience which is far too voluble and active to be impressive. It is more youthful than faithful, more ardent than sagacious, more energetic than inspired. It would express everything and at once in word or deed. They forget that the ardent lucid noon hides the solemn stars, and heaven's true majesty of night, no less than does the thickest cloud. Of this there is no sign in Christ. His institutions were not devised in the interest of the world's speedy evangelisation. He could wait for the souls He redeemed as well as for the God He revealed. The waiting energy of the Church is just as faithful as its forward movements, and at certain times more needful. Faith has ever a holy indifference and a masterly negligence which rest on the infinitude of divine care and the completeness of Christ's work.

Christ exhibited God, He did not expound Him. He was His witness, not His apologist. He acted on God and for God; He was a power more than a prophet, and a prophet more than a polemist. He did more to reveal than to interpret. And His revelation was in work more than in word, in a soul more than a scheme. He gave a living Spirit more than a living truth, the Holy Spirit more than a vital principle. In Him God gave Himself, He did not explain Himself. He *was* the revelation, He did not elaborate it. To see Him was to see the Father,

The Holy Father

not to see how He could be the Father. We have the benefit of the achievement. We love and trust its doer. We might trust Him less if He had more to say about it. Our faith is trust in Christ who died, rather than trust in the faith of a Christ. It is trust in a Christ who effected forgiveness by His work, not who explained forgiveness in His word, or kept His act incessantly in our ears. It was not for the Redeemer to be eloquent, or even explicit, about His own work. He did it, and it acts for ever. It set up no new affection in God, but a new and creative relation on both sides of the spiritual world. It gave man a new relation to God, and God, a new relation, though not a new feeling to man. It did not make God our Father, but it made it possible for the Father to treat sinners as sons.

But the great crisis itself transpired in the secret place of the Most High; and the silence of the Gospels reflects the Saviour's own reserve. It is the stillness of a quiet, earnest, strong, retiring man. Yea, it is the silence of the unworldly and unseen, the shadow of the holiest, the gaze of the Cherubim, the hush of the great white throne, of holy wars in high places, of far off spiritual things—slow, subtle, solemn, spiritual things. The silence of the first creation no man heard or saw. That silence is repeated in the second. It is the silence of the moving heavens, of the rising sun, of the Resurrection in the cool, dim dawn of the Church's faith and love, of all the mightiest action of the Holy Ghost—yea, of His witness borne in your hearts in this hour when I speak these holy names and presume to call these awful powers. If

The Holy Father

ye call upon the Father, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear—in reverent and godly fear. For this holy Fatherhood is at its heart the consuming fire.

VIII.

The isolation
of Christ

I add, with some misgiving, one consideration more. The reserve of Christ in the Gospels is part of the silence and isolation which filled the cup of His suffering. He had nobody to speak to about it. Nobody could understand. He had no Paul among His disciples. Peter and John were not yet born into this. Yea, at the last the Father Himself grew silent to Him, and communion ceased, though faith and prayer did not. Sigh or brief soliloquy alone remained. He had to consume the smoke of His own torment and ours. His lonely silence was a needful part of His precious agony, of His suffering work. It was a condition of His work's success. Its dumb submission was essential to His complete practical recognition of the holiness of the judgment He bore. It was part of that perfect obedient praise of the Father's righteousness which rose in human extremity from His faith and love. There was more praise in the tenacity of this dumb solitude than when He rejoiced in spirit and said: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth." It was holiness owning holiness under the *unspeakable* load of human guilt. It was an essential part of the holy judgment He bore, that it should be borne alone with the Father veiled, the future veiled, and (may I

The Holy Father

say) with some *explicit* sense veiled to Himself of that value which the occultation of His glory and knowledge was having for God and for man. Yes, it was, perhaps, part of His work's perfect glory *not* to know, to be silent in the agony of knowing only the Father's will and not the Father's way. His self-emptying meant self-limitation in knowledge as in other things. I have already applied to Christ's consciousness the words which Calvin applies to His ubiquity: "The whole Christ was there, but not all that is in Christ was there." And this repudiation of entire knowledge may well have been a vital element in the agony of the great act. It was an act that drew not upon His theology, but on the spiritual resources of His moral personality in its superhuman obedience and trust. His silence may have been due to voluntary ignorance, to nescience by holy and omnipotent consent. It was, perhaps, the abyss of His self-emptying, the triumph of His superhuman humiliation, His utter exercise of those self-imposed limitations which made His incarnation, the negative exertion of His will's omnipotence in all that was needful to redeem. It was perhaps His power through positive trust to curb the passion to know, His acquiescence by faith in some theological ignorance, His consent not *explicitly* to see *how* His mortal obedience expiated and redeemed. His certainty only that it did, that the Holy Father had need of it for His holiness, for His kingdom, for His sons. Had He seen all, He could have suffered but little. To have known in detail at that hour the whole meaning, power, and effect of His

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The Saviour's
true dying

sorrow would have been to quench it in the glory that could really only come with salvation, when He had sounded its darkness and risen on the other side. The tree of knowledge is not the tree of life.

And so this silence was the draining of sorrow's cup. To see all would be to suffer none. And to utter suffering is to escape some. To confide it is to ease it. To die alone is the death in death. Silence is sorrow's crown of sorrow, and can be more pathetic than death. And the silence of the Gospels reflects the Saviour's true dying, His utter suffering, His nescience, His loneliness, His certainty in darkness, His trust, His perfect obedience. As the brevity of His life was part of His greatness, so the lack in the Gospels is the condition of their greater perfection; it is a part of their completeness as a reflection of the Redeemer. And the silence of both reflects the awful silence, the hiding of the Father and the future which was the crowning condition of redemption, and the last worst test of holy obedience and dying trust. It was not the Father's anger but His holy love, unspeakable by word or look, to be uttered only by deed, by Resurrection. As Christ's love could only speak silently at last in the *act* and mystery of dying, so God could only answer silently in the mysterious *act* of raising Him from the dead. And this was more than comforting Him in death, for it was raising Him from death's utmost desolation, from death comfortless, the deadliest death, death's sharpest sting and utmost power. Deep called unto deep, and the Will that died addressed

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and evoked the Will that raised Him up again in a silent antiphon which is now the standing balance and order of the spiritual world for ever.

So it did not become the Captain of our salvation to say much about the cost of His grace or the agony of Fatherhood. And it did become the saved to say very much about it indeed. And it becomes the Church always not only to enjoy the Father's grace, but to learn to prize it. We must gain some reasonable sense of the mystery we cannot fathom. We must weigh the gravity of sin in the face of holiness, for the sake of worshipping the Saviour's grace, and love's earnestness about its holy law. It is not in this effort that the Church has departed from the Holy Ghost or gone back from the teaching of the Gospels. The Church may wander far; but, as even Goethe said, she must ever return to adjust her compass at the cross. She cannot rest satisfied with the impressionism of the cross. The cross is not there just for religious effect. The Church takes her moral bearings there. She finds her moral standard there. She discovers God's moral world and authority there. She reconstructs man's conscience from there, from the word, revelation and nature of the cross, not its sound and music and effect alone. In an instinct so central, so persistent as this, has the Church been misled? Then either she has not had the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Ghost in her has been false to the work of Christ and its true nature and power.

The Holy Father

IX.

The Father-
hood is the
source of man's
redemption

We put too little, therefore, into the Fatherhood of God if we say He is the Father of us sinners without more ado, that nothing beyond our repentance was due to His holiness, that His love could be trusted if He let His holiness go, that He could show His heart's affections by simply choosing not to press His nature's demands.

We put too little into Fatherhood none the less if we think that the satisfaction of Christ was the source and cause of the Father's grace instead of its fruit.

And we likewise put too little into it if we dwell on the cost of forgiveness to God till we lose all sense of the grace in grace, its fulness, freedom, and spell, its tenderness, patience, and utter magnanimity with us.

But too much no son of man can put into that hallowed Fatherhood which is the whole of God and the fulness of Christ. It is the very nature and totality of Godhead, and the source of man's redemption. Its solemn love is the burden of the Saviour's bloody passion, and it is the consecration of man's red-ripe passion for man. No name so fits our whole soul's whole God. Humanism has nothing so human, Christ has nothing so superhuman as this "*Holy Father*." It wraps the world like the warm waters of the cleansing sea. They touch the horrors of the nether earth below,

The Holy Father

and above reflect the heaven's endless smile. It is ever like

The moving waters at their priest-
like task

Of pure ablution round earth's human
shores.

We cannot simplify it on that name, we cannot exhaust it. It is the deepest name and the dearest. It speaks to child, maid, and man. It is the tenderest, sternest, broadest, most sublime. It stamps our humanest part as our godliest. The life of home, country, humanity, of church and kingdom, of action, passion, conscience, our human ties and duties, tender or heroic—that is now what bears God's monogram in us—the moral soul with all its love, conscience, care, grace, devotion, grandeur, woe and joy. The old dear names in their new creation are the divinest still, and the nearest at our need. They are the holiest and most human too. Father, mother, wife, child, lover and maid—that is the old story of which the world never grows weary. Of the tale of romance and of renunciation we do not weary. Two lovers whispering by an orchard wall, these weeping their first-born dead or lost, these chilled and estranged for ever, or these at last grown grey and sleeping together at the foot of the hill,—such things outlast in their interest for us all the centuries of human care and crime. They outlive our folly, noise and sin, earth's triumph, glories, failures, fevers and frosts. But not only so. They are immortal also in God. They are hid with Christ in

The Holy Father

God. Eternity does not draw a sponge over the heart. Our great passions are laid up beneath the altar of the Father's passion to redeem. They are smoothed out there where all crooked things are made straight. For us with our faith in Christ's Holy Father, love is not what the pessimists make it—Nature duping the individual in the interests of the species. It belongs to the eternal. Our brief life translates passion into affection, and our affections into moral worth. It spiritualises, consecrates them. If life do that, how much more eternity! If life can thus reveal, wherefore not death? If life hallow, how much more does God the Holy! It is His own life that flows in these undying loves and ties. They will not give us the Father, but the Holy Father gives us them a thousandfold. Their perpetual song is but the echo of the Spirit, the murmur in the winding heart of the solemn, ceaseless river, which gladdens the city of God, and its fulness is the music of the world. Our first love and our last, its young dream and its old sorrow, are eternalised in our Alpha and Omega, the Eternal Father, the Holy Redeemer. *There* also is the fountain of the sainthood that weds mankind, has the world for its parish, and lays down its life for those who are neither kith nor kin but thankless and evil. Holy Father! It means a household God in a house not made with hands, the king of a righteous kingdom of loving hearts, a social God with a social gospel, a triune God who is an eternal home and society in Himself. Love, loss, fatherhood, motherhood, wifehood, widowhood, home,

The Holy Father

country, and the heroisms that renounce these, are all eternal in the heavens. They are embalmed for ever in the heart of the infinite Father, once bereaved of His Son, and the Eternal Son, once orphaned of His Father. That is the holy love, sure of itself, which we need to correct the malady of our over-sensitive age.

The holy
love

Never did human pity and affection mean so much as to-day; but neither to-day nor to-morrow will it be dear or solemn enough for that primeval, endless love of God. The grace of the Holy Eternal Father has but one image among men, and it is the holy face of Jesus and Him as crucified. The cause of the cross was not only that man was lost, nor that God is love, but also that the Father is holy. Holiness is love's end, and it is only because He is holy that His Fatherhood is inexhaustible and our loves endure. Holiness is that in the love of God which fixes it and assures it for ever. If holiness fail not, then love cannot. If it cannot be put by, then love cannot fade. The holiness which demanded that Christ should die is, by its satisfaction, our one guarantee of the love that cannot die. If God had taken His holiness lightly, how could we be sure He would never be light of love? But He that spared not His own Son, how shall He not with Him also give us all things, and be to us all things which love should crave? There never was a more tender time than the present. But when we read behind the cross, and not only feel it, the heart of fatherhood is that *moral* tenderness which is so much more than pity, which

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not only weeps, soothes, and helps—but forgives, and forgives as one who in forgiving has to atone and redeem. To-day we are learning new depths of that *moral* tenderness which is the soul of grace, and that *holy* kindness which is the source of Atonement. The cross has more than the moral majesty that broods on earth's solemnities, renunciations, pities, sorrows, and tragic purifications. It brought into history eternal redemption. We never understood as we do to-day the father of the child; perhaps we never were so ready to believe in the father of the prodigal. But also we never had such promise of understanding the Father of the Saviour.

The Father of our childhood and weakness we beautifully understand. Could it be put more movingly than in Mr. Patmore's poem. He had punished his little son and put him to bed, "his mother, who was patient, being dead." Sore himself, he went to see the child, and found him asleep, with all the queer and trivial contents of a little boy's pocket set out beside him to comfort him.

"So when that night I prayed
To God, I wept, and said:
Ah! when at last we lie with tranced
 breath,
Not vexing Thee in death,
And Thou rememberest of what toys
We made our joys,
How weakly understood
Thy great commanded good—

The Holy Father

Then, Fatherly not less
Than I whom Thou hast moulded
from the clay,
Thou 'lt leave Thy wrath and say,
'I will be sorry for their childishness.' "

That is most sweet and poignant pathos. And it is neither too keen nor too kind for the *pity* of God to His *weak* children. It melts us. It is very sacred.

But there is a deeper, tenderer note. It is the grace of God to His prodigals and rebels. "I even I am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, and thy sins and thine iniquities will I remember no more." That bows us. It takes us into the Holy Place.

But One takes us behind that into the holiest of all. Deepest of all, tenderest, most solemn, glorious, silent, and eternal is the Father's joy in the Holy Son obedient on the sinful cross.

That joy is the Father's love of His own holiness. It is His blessed and only form of self-love.

It is all beyond thought, beyond poetry, beyond Scripture, beyond speech. God Himself in that mighty joy refrains from words. He could utter it only in act, in raising Christ from the dead by the spirit of holiness. He met the Son's great act by a greater. Deep answered deep. We can feel it and worship it at the last only in the power and silence of the same Holy Ghost. May He never fail us, but keep us burning unconsumed, sure, wise, kind, and strong, in His endless peace and power.



The Living Christ

THE LIVING CHRIST.

"Fear not: I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead; and see, I am alive for evermore; and have the keys of the unseen and of death."—REV. i. 17, 18.

THIS is a bundle of paradoxes—contradictions which do not exclude but include each other; nay, which *need* each other.

What is our
faith in
Christ?

It is thus that God includes and needs man; the infinite strength needs and includes infinite weakness. To meet our weakness God did not stoop *from* Himself, but *in* Himself.

So also God is the least apparent and yet the most real of powers in the world and life. No God—atheism is the most plausible and the most incredible of creeds.

Thus also Christ is the most provoking and elusive of beings, but the most haunting, the least to be got rid of. To mere inquiry how fugitive, to faith how near, how steady, how mighty, for time and for eternity! And the cross of Christ, the great absurdity of history, is the centre and solution of history.

Christian faith is a mass of contradictions and a glorious tissue of harmony. It is easy to make it seem ridiculous to common sense. But it is fatal for religion to appeal to common sense.

Our faith is faith in a Christ who is and who is not, in a dead man who is our living God, in the

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living God who died, in one who was humiliated into eternal exaltation, who in extreme weakness realised and revealed the supreme power of heaven and earth.

What is this faith in this Christ?

It is faith:—

I. In a historic Christ.

II. In a living Christ.

III. In a Christ personal to each of us.

I.—THE HISTORIC CHRIST.

Faith in the
Historic
Christ

There *was* such a man. The story of Him is not an invention. Even if it were conceded that everything told of Him is not literally true, *He* was a reality. His figure is real and palpable in history. There is a distinct and powerful character among the great figures of the past—called Jesus, living in a certain land, at a certain time, with certain aims, doctrines, actions, way of life, and manner of death.

Moreover, this man is prolonged into posterity. He has had a vast influence in history. You could not deny *that*, even if you were among those that reject the influence for themselves.

But no serious mind or conscience either denies or deplures that influence in the past as a whole. To deplore Christ is to renounce the right to moral consideration. Even if He is not the Redeemer, He has been a vast blessing. He deserves more attention and gratitude than Plato, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, Newton, or any of the heroes of culture and civilisation. He has

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done more for the race, for humanity as humanity. Even if you question His power in eternity, you cannot deny the blessing He has been for time, through those who believed in Him as above and beyond time.

None of the most precious boons of civilisation would have been here to-day without Christianity, without Christ. He came in and raised a new civilisation out of the wreck of the old. He saved the soul of the old, moreover. Christian Europe has lost nothing essential from Greece or Rome. And it enshrines and embalms their soul. That would remain true, even if His new civilisation was presently going to be superseded. It is Christianity that is the true continuity of the old world and the new. And it is Christianity that has made the modern nations and all their achievements possible.

Especially is this so with the achievements of love and their growth. There is much to disappoint, especially in the spectacle of modern Europe—the Europe of the newspapers. But even there, ask what would have been had Christianity not come in when it did, had it not worked in these centuries as the principle it is. It has failed to put down war. It has even caused some wars and bitter persecutions. So far, yes. But it has done so chiefly by the infection and corruption of political ideas and methods. Politics have well nigh destroyed Christianity. But the tide has really turned, though not much more. Politics have begun to undergo conversion. The recent Machiavelism of some Christian states has



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shocked the Christian conscience, and roused more than a few to feel that if Christianity do not master the State, the State will destroy Christianity. This has long been apparent in Church politics; it is now coming slowly home in the politics of the State. And as to war, there is nothing else that even promises to put down war. Democracy and self-interest do not do so, and do not tend to do so. Democracies are even more liable to fits of blind passion than monarchs. And it should be remembered that it was the Christian pulpit and the Christian principle in the press and elsewhere that recently prevented a war between the two great democracies of the world.

There is a Europe, there is a Christendom which does not appear in the newspapers, even in the religious press. Journalism is not so much blind to it as shy of it. It is of vast, silent, spreading influence. It is the Europe, the Christendom of Faith—the civilisation of the Spirit, the true Church of the heart and soul. That is the Europe, the America, that makes the real difference from the past, the real promise for the future. It is the Europe that most directly owns the influence of Christ in its heart, its conduct, its faith, and its hope, in life private and public.

Nobody has ever exerted such an influence, whether you like it or whether you do not. And it is an effect produced by One who went in the face of human nature. He gave effect, it is true, to certain vast, deep human *tendencies*; but so far as human *prejudices and tastes* go, He went in

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their teeth. Here is what the late Professor Freeman says: "You say, Am I still a believer? Certainly. That is, I believe the Christian religion to be from God, in a sense beyond that in which all things are from God. One cannot study history without seeing this. The fact that there was a Holy Roman Empire—that is, the fact that the Roman Empire could ever become holy in a Christian sense—is enough. . . . I compare it with Islam, which is in the like sort the Arabian religion, the religion of all countries that have come under Arabian influences, and of none other. But mark the difference. Islam succeeds by the most obvious causes; by appealing to all that was good and bad in the Arab of the seventh century. Christianity, on the other hand, went right in the teeth of all that was good and bad in the Roman of the fourth century. Yet it succeeded; and I cannot account for its success by any ordinary cause. As I said in one of my published lectures, 'For Cæsar Augustus to be led to worship a crucified Jew was a greater miracle than the cleaving of rocks or the raising of the dead.'"

The incomparable personality of Christ

What a personality that was! If you only study it as a historian might Napoleon, it is an incomparable personality. Think of all that has come from Christ in the way of blessing, in the way of counterworking the curse, and corruption, and error which His very followers have infused into His name. Think out with just and careful appreciation the blessing flowing directly from His memory and influence to-day. What a personality!

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And you cannot get more out than was in. If so much has been got out, how much must there have been in that miraculous soul! And how much remains!

All this may be recognised by a dead faith, what you might call the plebeian faith of the ordinary able man, a poor but honest faith, a faith merely historic and intelligent, as a mere matter of observation. Christ as a historic force is now on a height from which He can never again be displaced. So much the new study of history has done.

But this is hardly faith. It is not living faith. It is not the kind of response Christ died to evoke. It is not the kind of faith that has made even its own meagre kind possible. It is not the kind that has perpetuated His influence, and made His power survive deep in the general heart of man.

On some who study Christ as a mere figure in history there dawns another kind of influence from Him. They begin as historians, as critics; they end as sympathisers, advocates, enthusiasts. They came to embalm Him with their spices, and they stay to worship, and return to confess. They are touched, seized, suborned as His witnesses. They can no more be as impartial as if it were Napoleon, Socrates. The ordinary able man may merely discuss Him. The prizeman, in the pulpit or elsewhere, may make of Him a declamation. But no human-hearted man, no man of soul can really be impartial in dealing with Christ. Our sympathies are engaged, captured, preoccupied.

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We cannot hold this Man at arm's length. The historic Christ stirs in humane minds a faith, a response, which makes mere criticism difficult or impossible. The critic yields to the discovery that this awful and ultimate critic of his soul never judged men impartially, but always with a bias in their favour, and with a view to their escape. "The Lord is our Judge He will save us." We cannot view Him in dry light, or discuss Him in cold blood. There comes forth the prelude of a living faith. This Man acts on the heart. He wakes admiration, fear, love, and, above all, faith, trust. He is found to haunt life as no other does. He becomes an unseen spectator and standard of all we do and devise. His beauty, terror, dignity, and invincibility pervade us. His love, mercy, faithfulness, master us. His indomitable grace survives death and rises again in us. He becomes an imaginative ideal, and then a moral imperative. His principle of Divine Sonship becomes the base of a new religion.

We cannot
hold this Man
at arm's length

But this is a principle which is inseparable from His Person. He introduced it into history, and He goes down the stream of history with it in His soul. He carries it; it does not carry Him. He does not set it afloat and leave it. Where it is He is. Where He is, it is. Through Him it circulates among leal hearts as current coin. But many separate the two. They are at a stage at which they answer to His principle more than to His Person. They think more of His present legacy than of His present life. Christianity is not for them identical with Christ. He is beauti-

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ful, sublime, wise, wonderful, mighty; He affects them strangely, and more than they quite realise and own. He is Preacher, He is Example; nay, He is the incarnation of His principle. But He is not yet its eternal guardian and guarantee. He is not yet the incarnation of God. They do not yet say, "My Lord and my God."

Now these have no dead faith. Yet they have not a living faith.

"They are between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born."

They are much more than critics and historians. But they are not yet the property of Christ, slaves like Paul, devotees like John. They believe in the Christ that lived and was dead. But they do not believe in the absolute Victor, Redeemer, and King, in the Christ that liveth for evermore, with the keys of hell and death. A living faith is not mere sympathy with a historic Christ. It is not admiration, reverence, love of that great ideal. It is not the acceptance of His principle, or the assent to His truth. Nay, response to a merely historic Christ is not adequate even to that Christ. It does not meet His claims. It is not the whole response His teaching wakes, or His work evokes, or His character compels, or His soul sought. Faith in the Christian principle is not the living faith in Christ. We may hold truth as it is in Jesus, and miss it as Jesus, miss Jesus as Himself the Truth alive for evermore.

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II.—THE LIVING CHRIST.

When we speak of the difference between a dead faith and a living, what we really mean is a difference in the *object* of our faith more than in its kind. The object determines the kind. The great fundamental difference is between a dead Christ and a living. Living faith is faith in a living Christ. It is only a living Christ that calls out a living faith, a faith with stay and power—especially power.

Faith in the
living Christ

Do not fret yourself examining your faith, trying its limbs, feeling its pulse, watching its colour, measuring its work. See rather that it is set on a living Christ. Care for that Christ and He will care for your faith. Realise a living Christ, and He will produce in you a living faith. Visit His holy sepulchre in Scripture, and as you pore and wait He will surprise you from behind with His immortal life. A living faith, a living Christianity, a living Christendom, means a living Christ. Christianity is more than Christendom, but Christ is more than Christianity. The truth of Christ is more than its appreciation by any age of the Christian Church. But Christ Himself is more than Christianity. He is more than any truth that can be told about Him, any principle He embodies, or any deeds done in His name. Faith in Christ is faith neither in Christendom (or a Church) nor in Christianity (or a system of creed or conduct). But it is faith in the practical reality of His unseen Person, now living, reigning, guid-

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ing from His unseen throne the history and the hearts of men to the Kingdom of God.

He acts in many ways. He acts by His historic character. He acts by His historic Church. But still more He acts by His Eternal Person and Holy Ghost. This living Lord is invisible, invincible, and immortal; He is royal, and at the last irresistible; He is infinitely patient because of infinite power and grace; He acts not only on the large course of human events, but directly on living souls and wills, whether humble or refractory; and He rejoices alike in the love of His Father and the love of His Redeemed, and in the communion of both.

To realise this is more than faith in a historic Christ. But it is what faith in a historic Christ arrives at when it grows up and comes to its own, when it finds its true self and soul, its meaning and fulness, its wisdom and stature in an eternal light.

Why may I say so? Is it all a piece of pulpit dogmatism?

The Christian preacher is bound to say it because it is certain that Christ believed and said it.

He believed and said He was more than a historic servant of God raised for a temporary purpose and then done with. He knew and said that He was before the world ("Before Abraham was, I am"), and that He would outlive the world and be King of the adoring love of the souls He made His own. All things were delivered to Him of His Father. And all things include sin, death,

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the devil, and mankind. "All power is given Me in heaven and on earth." He would be with His own as the Father was with Him. He went to prepare a place for them, and would come again to take them to it. From heaven He would be still on earth in His kingdom, to watch, guide, and bless. Without Him they could do nothing. And such doctrine does not depend on the fourth Gospel alone.

Was Christ
deceived in
Himself?

What did all that kind of teaching mean? Either that He was what I have said, or that He was the victim of some egoistic delusion. But if He was a "megalomaniac" of this kind, what is the worth of His teaching on all else? If He was deceived about Himself, how can you put any value on what He said about the Father, about man, about the world? "Is He to be believed when He spoke of everything but Himself?" Nay, if He was deluded about Himself when He made Himself so central to His truth, He is trustworthy about nothing, and only suggestive in greater or less degree.

You cannot stop with faith in a merely historic Christ if you are in earnest about the matter. Your heart will not let you, and your reason will not. Your historic Christ was one who called Himself much more than historic. And if He was wrong, then He ceases to be an object of entire admiration, and becomes an object of some pity. He exercises our patience, and not our trust. Faith in a *merely* historic Christ destroys itself because it makes Christ a mistaken enthusiast. And no mistaken enthusiast can be an object of

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faith. Unless, indeed, you think so meanly of human nature that you can believe that for centuries it has made a God of such a soul, and taken His craze for its creed, till we have found Him out to-day.

To treat Christ as a mere historic person is not Christianity. It is another Gospel from the whole Church's, from the New Testament's, from Christ's own.

Humanity will never part with Christ now. But it can only keep Him by taking His word on a point like this. If it do not trust Him there, it dissolves Him, and cannot hold Him even as a hero or a saint, to say nothing of a Saviour. He becomes less than the ideal man of yesterday if He be not the Redeemer and King to-day and for ever.

If you dismiss Him because He is in collision with the laws of your universe, these laws must not be denied. But are they the laws of the soul as well? Must your soul not be told that He too is a universe, and not simply a fact, or a factor, in ours? If He enter life, it is that life may enter Him. He is a world within the world, the destiny awaiting the world, the truth which the world is working out. He is the order within the order of things, prescribing their order at the last.

“That our Faith, far from vanishing,
rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Become my universe that feels
and knows.”

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Such is living faith in a living Christ. If such a soul live, it must be as Eternal King of the spiritual world. Redeemed Humanity would for ever elect Him King if they could forget that it was He who elected them. He is King, Law, and Principle of the spiritual world. Or else He is lost. His reign is either absolute or doomed.

If He is not living, faith must dwindle and die. Do you think you can feed living faith on a dead Christ? You say, perhaps, living faith in God may now go on, even if we lost some faith in Christ. What! could living faith go on in a God who could let such an one as Christ die, who could disappoint the confident faith of Christ Himself that God would raise Him up to glorious life? How can you have living faith in such a God? Is He the Father if His most glorious, only begotten Son be dead? A poor and undivine Fatherhood! Not so very much mightier than our own if it has to see its best beloved perish and cannot help. If God did not raise Christ, but failed Him after such a faith, how can He be more than a perhaps to any faith of ours? No; living faith, even in God, is faith in a living Christ. It is only such faith that can escape extinction. If He be a living Christ, He is not simply an immortal soul. He is not one among many immortals, not even the first among His peers. It is for those nearest Him that He is most peerless. He is King of the whole realm of the soul, and it is He that keeps our faith alive.

If it be not so, if He is only kept alive by our faith, that faith itself must sink under such a task

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If Christ be not
living, He be-
comes less and
less a power
for faith

—the task of keeping Christ immortal. If He is not the living, reigning Christ, He is a Christ growing weaker as the ages move on and He recedes into the past. He becomes less and less a power for faith. As He grows more distant, faith in Him grows more dim. If He be not a living Christ, then every generation makes His influence more indirect. It is transmitted to us through more and more people, and as humanity increases He decreases. More souls are interposed between our souls and Him, and absorb His limited light. He becomes lost and smothered in His Church and its corruptions, like any Buddha. The world moves on and leaves Him behind, moves on and outgrows Him. He becomes chiefly a scholar's Christ. It may even become a hope and an effort with us that we should outgrow Him. Great as He was for His own age, if He be not the living and reigning Christ we may, and even must, hope to reach a point of spiritual perfection beyond His, a communion more intimate with the Father, because knowing more of His will. We may even hope one day to be in a position to do more for His principle than His opportunities allowed Him to do. And each age will flatter itself that it has done so, that it has left Him behind, outdone His work, and can search the soul as He did not. There are no few to be found to-day who would say, for instance, that dramatists like Shakespeare or Ibsen have a knowledge of the heart Christ never had or has.

Well, this is a frame of mind fatal at least to Christ's place as Redeemer. It may esteem Him

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as Benefactor, but it displaces Him as Redeemer. It clears the ground for a totally new religion. It clears the ground, but it empties the soul, disappoints it, crushes its hope. If Christ were no Redeemer, it would need more than another such Christ: only to utter the sob of disappointment and despair that must rise in passion from the human soul as it awakes to its centuries of illusion, feels its spiritual chagrin, and resigns its eternal hopes. What soul could utter on the true scale of his soul the universal woe, "We trusted it had been He who should have redeemed mankind"? For it is just a Redeemer that we most need from God, and a living Redeemer. It is not a teacher, a living example we need, not a benefactor, not an ideal.

Nay, I will go farther. It is not simply a redemption we need. If Christ had come to perform a certain work of redemption, and then had ceased to be; if He had come to satisfy a divine justice with a holy victim, and had then passed into nothingness after satisfying the conditions and leaving the way free for God's love to go forth; if He had come to perform certain preliminaries of our salvation, and not for ever to be our Salvation—then we should have had in Him neither the Redemption nor Salvation that we need. We need a living Redeemer to take each one of us to God, to be for every one to-day all that He could have been upon earth to any one in that great yesterday, and to be for ever what He is to-day. We need a living Redeemer to plead for us in God, not against God, but against

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Our need of a
living, human
Redeemer

our accusing conscience, to be our Advocate with the Father against our self-condemnation. We need Him as the human conscience of God to come to our rescue against our conscience—and the more so as our conscience is quickened, socialised, exalted, and aggravated by solidarity with all the damnation of the world. Conscience makes us men and heroes. Yes, but it is conscience, too, that mocks our manhood with the memory of our sin, our neighbour's, and our kind's. If we were left alone with our conscience it would do more, on the whole, to overwhelm us than to redeem us or support us. We need some surety more sure and merciful and universal than our conscience. We need something more worthy than our natural moral manhood. We need to be made "more sure that we are Christ's than that we are men," more the servants of Christ's conscience than the heroes of our own, more penitents than stalwarts, more saints than iron-sides. That is our need of a Redeemer, of a living human Redeemer, a moral owner and King, a living Christ, a Lord and Master more immortal than ourselves, and the root of all that makes our immortality other than a burden. We need a living Redeemer. We need Him for a living faith. And we need Him, as I have already said, *for a living God*—for the reality of a living God.

Yes, to lose the living Christ is to lose the living God, and so on to lose our human soul and future. Whatever enfeebles the hold of Christ on the world now relaxes its sense of God. To escape from Christ, is only to be lost in the vague;

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it is not to ascend to God. It is faith in Christ that has kept belief in a God from dying out in the world. It is never the arguments of the thinkers or the intuitions of the saints that have done that. If Christ grow distant and dim, the sense of a living personal God, of Christ's God and Father, fades from the soul, and the power of God decays from life. And what happens then? We lose faith in man—in each other, and in ourselves. To lose the sense of God is, in course of time, to lose faith even in our own selves, our confident, defiant selves. The soul that in its own strength defies God, dismisses Him from life, has taken the greatest step to losing faith in itself. How is that? It is thus. What I have said is, lose the living personal God, as in losing Christ you would lose Him, and you lose your own soul, your very self-confidence. And it is thus. Make your God not a living God, but a force, a blind, heartless power, or even an irresponsive idea, and you make Him something your heart and will can have no intercourse with. Will can only commune with will, heart with heart. Make your ideal of Humanity an abstraction, not a living soul like Christ's, and you reduce Humanity, as you would reduce God, to a mere ideal or a mere power. You make God and man at their highest something the heart cannot converse with. You rob them of personality. Yet they remain all the time powers greater than the simple soul. So that the great practical feature and experience of the soul, its personality. is something of inferior worth to the world and its

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powers. In its nature as living, soul personality falls below the Almighty power of the universe. But once let the human soul be sure of that and it is all over with it. It will soon lose power to stand up against such a universe, against the spectacle of nature, against the shocks of life. The universe will roll over it. It loses confidence in itself, because it lost faith in a living God. The soul is lost because it lost God, the living God; and it lost Him because it lost His revealed Humanity—the living Christ as its Mediator and Redeemer with Him for ever.

Mediator and Redeemer! must we not go farther even than that with an ever-living Christ? Yes, one step farther. Intercessor! Steward and Key-bearer of the spiritual world! “He ever liveth to make intercession for us.” It is an ever-lasting Redemption, and therefore it is a ceaseless Intercession.

THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST.

The soul of
Atonement
is prayer

The intercession of Christ is simply the prolonged energy of His redeeming work. The soul of Atonement is prayer. The standing relation of Christ to God is prayer. The perpetual energy of His Spirit is prayer. It is prayer (and *His* prayer) that releases for us the opportunities and the powers of the spiritual world. It is the intercession of Christ that is the moving force within all the spiritual evolution of history. It is the risen Redeemer that has the keys of the world unseen—the keys which admit it to history as well as

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open it to man. The key of the unseen is prayer. That is the energy of the will which opens both the soul to the kingdom and the kingdom to the soul. But never *our* prayer. It is a prayer *for* us, not *by* us.

It is Christ the Intercessor that has the key of the unseen—to deliver *from* death, to deliver *into* fulness of spiritual life. The Redeemer would be less than eternal if He were not Intercessor. The living Christ could not live and not redeem, not intercede. Redemption would be a mere act in time if it were not prolonged as the native and congenial energy of the Redeemer's soul in the Intercession of Eternity. Do not picture Christ the Intercessor as a kneeling figure beseeching God for us. It is God within God; God in self-communion; God's soliloquy on our behalf; His word to Himself, which is His deed for us. Rise to think of His intercession as the standing and inexhaustible energy of the divine soul as Redeemer, its native quality, divinity, and occupation through all the variety of the spiritual world for ever. The priestly atonement of Christ was final, but it was final in the sense of working incessantly, insuperably on, not in its echoes and results with us, but in the self-sustained energies of His own Almighty and immortal Spirit. This is the priesthood which is the end of priesthood, and its consummation the satisfaction of the priestly idea. The chief reason why we resent an ecclesiastical priesthood is not because it impairs our independence, but because it challenges the true, final, and sufficient priesthood and inter-

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cession of the Redeemer. It deadens the vitality for us of the living Christ. It darkens the glory of His Reconciliation, beclouds the spirit-world, seals up the soul by sealing the powers of death and the unseen, and taking out of the Saviour's hand the key that opens the spirit-world. The intercession of saints is only an attempt to pick the lock, and the sacrifice of the Mass only a forcing of the bolt which freely yields to the intercession of the Redeemer alone.

III.—THE CHRIST PERSONAL TO US.

Faith in the
Christ personal
to us

Faith in Christ (as a last word) is faith in a Christ personal to us.

We must have the historic Christ and more. We must have the living Christ. But a living Christ who only ruled His kingdom in the unseen *by general laws* would be no sufficient Saviour. He must be personal to us. He must be *our* Saviour, in *our* situation, *our* needs, loves, shames, sins. He must not only live but mingle with *our* lives. He must charge Himself with *our* souls. We believe in the Holy Ghost. We have in Christ as the Spirit the Sanctifier of our single lives, the Reader of our hearts, the Helper of our most private straits, the Inspirer of our most deep and sacred confessions. We must have one to wring from us "*My* Lord and *my* God." We need not only the risen Christ, but the returned Christ; not only the historic Christ, nor the heavenly, but the spiritual, the intimate, the Husband of the soul in its daily vigour, its daily

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conflict, its daily fear, its daily joy, its daily sorrow, its daily faith, hope, love. We need, O how we need, a Lord and Master, a Lover and King of our single, inmost, shameful, precious souls, the Giver and Goal of our most personal salvation, a Conscience within our conscience, and a Heart amidst our heart and its ruins and its resurrection.

That is the Christ we need, and, thank God for His unspeakable gift, that is the Christ we have.

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